

History of the Crusades. Episode 255. The Baltic Crusades. The Prussian Crusade Part XXI. A Less Fuzzy End.

Hello again. Last week we arrived at a point in the timeline which some scholars view as being the end of the Prussian Crusade. Yet here we are with another episode on the Prussian Crusade. Confused? Well, to try and put your mind at ease, the Prussian Crusade is, in some senses, already at an end. The borders of Prussia are now finalized, and the pagan population within those borders is mostly subdued, with an emphasis on the word "mostly". We will be looking in this episode at those pagans who are still shaking their fists at their Christian overlords in Prussia, and we will see how they are faring. Really, this episode will aim to take the Prussian Crusade to its final, total, and non-fuzzy end.

OK. Now, before we conclude the Prussian Crusade, there are important events taking place in the Holy Land which we need to follow, as these events will have a huge impact on the future of the Teutonic Order, and on the Baltic Crusades. Now, if any of you have good memories for dates, you will have noticed, as we proceed along the timeline for the Baltic crusades, that we are approaching an event which pretty much spelled the end of the Middle Eastern Crusades, the fall of Acre in the year 1291. Now, we have covered the fall of Acre in our episodes on the Middle Eastern Crusades, but what we didn't cover was the strange behind-the-scenes shenanigans which occurred in the upper echelons of the Teutonic Order in Acre at this time.

Now, along with the Templars and the Hospitallers, the Knights of the Teutonic Order were heavily involved in the defense of Acre, which was in effect, an attempt to keep hold of the final Latin Christian foothold in the Middle East. The current Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, Grand Master Burchard, was actually in Prussia when news came in that things looked like going south in the Holy Land, and that he was urgently needed back in Acre. This was in the year 1289. Master Konrad of Prussia has been doing a fabulous job as Master. You may recall that back in the year 1283 he subdued the Sudovians, effectively bringing the Prussian Crusade to a fuzzy end. But interestingly, Grand Master Burchard does not appear to have been a fan of Master Konrad.

While he was in Prussia, Grand Master Burchard did a snap inspection of Teutonic assets in the region, and he wasn't impressed with what he saw. In fact, he was so unimpressed that he decided to demote Master Konrad back down to the position he held before being elevated the position of Master. So Master Konrad was now, once again, Marshall Konrad. Grand Master Burchard then elevated a man called Meinhard von Querfurt to the position of Master of Prussia. Then, news came in that he was urgently required back in Acre, so Grand Master Burchard made his way to Venice, where a ship and 40 Teutonic Knights were waiting to sail with him to the Holy Land.

Now, when Grand Master Burchard arrived in Acre, much drama ensued. No one really knows why, but three days after he arrived in Acre, Grand Master Burchard quit. Not only did he abruptly resign his post as Grand Master, he then proceeded to insult the Teutonic Order, by joining the Hospitallers. In his book "The Prussian Crusade" William Urban describes this incident as a terrible scandal, and he speculates that the sudden resignation of the Grand Master and the demotion of Master Konrad in Prussia may have been related. But since there is no record of the reasons behind the Grand Master's resignation, I guess we will never know exactly what happened.

Anyway, an acting Grand Master was elected, but he was killed during the siege of Acre. When the city of Acre fell in May of 1291, the Knights of the Teutonic Order scurried down to ships that were waiting to evacuate them, and they sailed away from the Holy Land, never to return.

Following the disastrous collapse of the Latin Christian presence in the holy land, the Pope proposed merging the three main military orders: the Templars, the Hospitallers, and the Teutonic Knights. The members of the military orders were all opposed to this plan, and it was eventually dropped. The Templars would be in existence for less than two decades after this point in time, having been effectively eliminated by Philip the Fair in the year 1307. The Hospitallers established themselves on the island of Rhodes in the year 1308, and the Teutonic Order decided to concentrate its efforts on its holdings in the Baltic region. An election was held in Venice after the fall of Acre to elect a new Grand Master, and the man the Order raised to the position was none other than Konrad von Feuchtwangen, the former Master Konrad, who had been the first Master of the combined Prussian and Livonian Orders.

Meanwhile, back in Prussia, Master Meinhard was busy building castles to consolidate and control the Prussian population. Castles were things that Master Meinhard knew well. William Urban reports that in the fifteen years prior to his becoming Master, he was castellan of a number of important castles in various locations across Prussia, including Königsberg and Brandenburg. He ordered a castle to be built on the site of the defeated Scalovian fortress at Ragnit, which assisted the Order to control Scalovia and also provided a base from which the Order could raid into Samogitia.

Master Meinhard's biggest concern at this time, though, was not the native Prussian population but raiding parties of Lithuanians. The raids by the Lithuanians seemed to be becoming more frequent, more successful, and more daring. In one entertaining example of Lithuanian fighting tactics at this time, the castellan of the new castle at Ragnit was traveling up the Nemunas river, the river upon which the castle had been constructed, when he saw a group of women beckoning him and calling out to him from the shore. As the castellan's boat drew closer to the group, one of the women shouted out in Polish that they were escaped prisoners who needed rescuing by the Teutonic Knights. The castellan decided that he should indeed rescue the women, but when the boat touched the shore, he discovered to his shock that the women weren't women at all, but were actually Lithuanian warriors wearing women's skirts. The cross-dressing Lithuanians secured the boat while a bunch of ordinarily attired Lithuanians raced out from the nearby forest, killing the castellan and all the other Knights who were in the boat. The next two castellans of Ragnit castle, made it their goal to attack as many Lithuanians as possible, and they also embarked on daring raids into neighboring Samogitia in the early 1290s.

The Lithuanians were also raiding into Kulm and Kujavia. Master Meinhard did his best to coordinate efforts with the Piast dukes to cut off the invading Lithuanians. But unfortunately, the Teutonic Order and the various leaders of the Polish duchies seemed to spend most of their time quarreling, instead of working together to push back against the Lithuanian threat. Master Meinhard ended up being diverted from his fights against the Lithuanians and his disagreements with the Piast dukes by the outbreak of the Fifth Prussian Insurrection. Now, just so you know, the Fourth Prussian Insurrection had briefly broken out in the year 1286 in Bartia and Pogesania, but it had been extinguished by the Order before it even really got started. The Fifth Prussian Insurrection, which commenced in the year 1295, was a little more serious. The Grand Duke of Lithuania lent his support to

rebels in Natangia and Samland, resulting in an uprising amongst the local Prussians. The insurrectionists managed to successfully capture a Teutonic stronghold, the castle at Bartenstein, then went on a German-killing and priest-killing rampage, which ventured as far as Konigsberg.

The Christian Natangians formed themselves into an army to defeat the rebels, and the castellan of Konigsberg Castle also gathered an army. But by the time the army was ready to move out of Konigsberg, the leaders of the Insurrection had already been captured and had been handed over to the Teutonic Order. The remaining rebels were defeated, and the Fifth and final Prussian Insurrection had come to an end, providing us with yet another point in time at which some historians argue that the Prussian Crusade ends.

There are two interesting points we should note about the Fifth Prussian Insurrection before we move on. The first interesting point is that Grand Master Konrad made his way from the Holy Roman Empire to Prussia when news reached him about the insurrection. William Urban reports that Grand Master Konrad assisted in suppressing the rebellion, then started his journey back to the Holy Roman Empire. But he died en route. A new Grand Master was elected in 1297, Grand Master Gottfried. The second interesting point about the Fifth Prussian Insurrection was that one of the victims of the uprising was Martin von Golin. Remember Martin von Golin? He was a sort of legendary freelancing ex-Teutonic fighter who roamed around the countryside, tricking pagans and undertaking amazing exploits that were told, exaggerated, and re-told around countless firesides. Well, when the Fifth Prussian Insurrection broke out, Martin happened to be living in a castle west of Konigsberg with a bunch of merry men. Deciding to insert his swashbuckling self into the action, he gathered his team of merry men together, and they rode to attack one of the rebel communities in Samland. He was returning from the raid when he was ambushed and killed. According to legend, Master Meinhard ordered a monument to be built at the place where Martin and his companions died. The monument was known as the Column of the Four Brothers, and was erected in a forest called the Kaporner Heide near Konigsberg. In the eighteenth century an enterprising person built an inn, complete with a beer garden, next to the pillar. No doubt Martin von Golin would have been chuffed to hear that men may have been drinking beer and sharing tales about his exploits centuries after his death. Unfortunately, though, there's no clear evidence that the pillar was actually dedicated to Martin von Golin and his companions, and it may well just be one of the many, many myths surrounding him. In case any of you are thinking that you might go and inspect the pillar, and have a beer at the inn, save yourself the journey as they both no longer exist.

Now, with the end of the Fifth and final Insurrection, we are getting closer to the definite, completely non-fuzzy end of the Prussian Crusade. The event which pretty much concludes the action in Prussia, took place a decade or so after the final Insurrection, in Pomerelia. Following the fifth Prussian insurrection, peace came to Prussia, and with peace came immigrants, mostly from the Holy Roman Empire, who were keen to make their fortunes in this new outpost of Latin Christendom.

Initially, the new settlers didn't really impact the native Prussians all that much. The Prussians who were already settled in Prussia, farming their land, were left alone to do so, while the new arrivals were granted land which the Prussians weren't occupying. The German settlers in particular possessed skills which the native Prussians had not yet developed, and so were able to drain swamps and clear large sections of forests in order to establish their own farming communities. Then problems started to arise. The new settlers possessed iron ploughs, which were heaps more efficient than the wooden

ploughs being used by the Prussians, and they brought with them modern farming techniques designed to increase production. This meant that the land farmed by the newcomers tended to be more productive than the land traditionally farmed by the Prussians. The Prussians, with their limited output of produce, tended to have to set aside most of the excess of their crop to pay their taxes whereas the newcomers seemed to produce enough to make tidy profits. Gradually then, a clear split emerged between the Prussians and the newcomers. Occasionally a Prussian man would leave his community to find work as a laborer on a German farm, but that generally meant cutting his Prussian ties forever, and the language and cultural barriers faced by such workers were formidable. Generally, both communities kept to themselves, intermingling as little as possible.

While these new dynamics were forming across Prussia, much drama was occurring in Pomerelia. Now, you will recall Duke Mestwin and his will. In a nutshell, the situation was this. Duke Mestwin, the ruler of Pomerelia, knew that he would die without an heir. To prevent the Teutonic Order racing in and taking over Pomerelia after his death, Duke Mestwin bestowed Pomerelia to Great Poland in his will. This didn't please the Teutonic Order, and it didn't please the Brandenburg dukes, who had been Duke Mestwin's allies ever since his run-in with King Ottokar, and had their eyes on Pomerelia themselves. The Brandenburg dukes actually managed to take over much of Pomerelia, and acted as overlords of the region until Duke Mestwin's death in 1294, at which time the terms of the will took effect, and the land suddenly came under the rule of Great Poland.

The ruler of Great Poland, Przemyslaw, was crowned King of Poland in 1295, and briefly visited Pomerelia before dying unexpectedly the following year. Much drama and Game-of-Thrones type activities took place to see who would next occupy the Polish throne. And while this chaos was going down, the Brandenburg dukes seized the opportunity to move in and occupy Pomerelia. They managed to conquer pretty much all of Pomerelia, except for the vital city of Danzig, or Gdansk, a town packed to the brim with German merchants. The Brandenburg dukes besieged the town, and in desperation the merchants sought assistance from the Teutonic Order in Prussia. The current Master of the Teutonic Order in Prussia was a man called Heinrich von Plotske, and Master Heinrich lead some forces to Danzig, and drove the Brandenburg dukes out of the city in September of the year 1308.

So the Teutonic Order now finds itself occupying one of the premier coastal trading cities on the Baltic Sea, and it found that it didn't really want to let it go. Then began a three-way tussle between the Brandenburg dukes, the Teutonic Order, and the man most likely to be the next King of Poland, a man called Wladislaw, for the possession of Danzig, Pomerelia and Pomerania. In the year 1309, the Brandenburg dukes were persuaded to sell their residual claim to Pomerelia to the Teutonic Order for the sum of 10,000 marks. The Order then moved into Pomerelia, and Master Heinrich announced that the Order would remain in Pomerelia until the issue of whether or not the region was part of Greater Poland or not, could be settled. Just so you know, that issue was finally settled - more than 600 later in World War II, when the region was handed back to Poland.

Now, if you are thinking that this whole saga was a massive win for the Teutonic Order, it actually wasn't. The Teutonic Order thought it was a win at the time, and Master Heinrich was widely celebrated for his general awesomeness. But it set up Poland as a rival, not an ally, of the Order, a fact that would have massive negative consequences for the Order further down the track.

Okay, that's it, I'm calling it. We've now officially come to the end of the Prussian Crusade. Next week we are returning to Livonia, where some truly crazy events have been going down. How crazy? Well get this. The Teutonic Order in Livonia is currently at war with the Archbishop of Riga and the merchants of Riga, who have allied themselves with Lithuania. Yes, that crazy. So join me next week, as we return to the Livonian field of action. Until next week, bye for now.

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